MR COLLINS'S DISCOURSE

OF

FREETHINKING;

PUT INTO PLAIN ENGLISH,

BY WAY OF ABSTRACT,

FOR THE USE OF THE POOR.

BY A FRIEND OF THE AUTHOR.

FIRST PRINTED IN 1713.

NOTE.

Of the deistical writers of the early eighteenth century, Anthony Collins (1676-1729) is, perhaps, the most celebrated. He was born near Hounslow and educated at Eton and Cambridge. His writings were mainly attacks on Christianity, and, in addition to the "Discourse on Freethinking," he published: "Discourse of the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion;" "Scheme of Literal Prophecy Considered;" "Priestcraft in Perfection;" "Historical and Critical Essay on the Thirty-Nine Articles;" and "A Philosophical Enquiry concerning Human Liberty." Most of these writings engaged him in many and violent controversies with some of the ablest divines of his time. Among these, beside Swift, may be named, Whiston, Hare, Hoadly, Bentley, and Samuel Clarke. Steele, also, had his fling at Collins, and thought that "if ever man deserved to be denied the common benefits of air and water, it is the author of 'A Discourse upon Freethinking'" ("Guardian," No. 3). But then Steele's opinion on such a matter was of no great moment. What was of more, was the fact that the school to which Collins belonged found a decided opponent in Locke, from the writings of whom the members of the school professed to draw their strongest arguments. For a philosophical appreciation of Toland, Collins, and the rest, see Mr. Leslie Stephen's "English Thought in the Eighteenth Century" (chaps. iii. and iv. of vol. i. 1881).

Swift took an entirely different attitude towards Collins from that assumed by the professional controversialists. He refused to take him seriously, and no doubt he felt that ridicule would as effectually serve his purpose as another method. Moreover, he sought to use the opportunity for scoring a point against the Whigs, by insisting on the political side of the matter, and, in the person of an assumed defender of Collins, betrayed undoubted Whig leanings. Swift, at this time, was deep in work, pamphleteering for Harley and St. John. He had already written "The Conduct of the Allies," and "Some Remarks on the Barrier Treaty," and was soon to write "The Public Spirit of the Whigs." The assumed and sarcastic defence of Collins must be taken as a Swiftian dodge to bring odium and suspicion on the opponents of the Tory ministry, by showing that the propounders of the hateful and ridiculous atheism were themselves Whigs.

Sir Henry Craik, in a note to his reprint of this tract ("Selections from Swift," Oxford, 1893, vol. ii. p. 42), agrees with Scott as to the motive which urged Swift in writing it. "In this later tract," he says, "Swift makes no attempt to cloak his enmity; and he boldly assumes the character of a Whig as the propounder of those atheistical absurdities, which he wished, as a useful political move, but without any scrupulous regard to fairness, to represent as part and parcel of the tenets of that

party." "What gave colour," says Scott, "though only a colour, to his charge was, that Toland, Tindal, Collins, and most of those who carried to licence their abhorrence of Church-government, were naturally enough enrolled among that party in politics who professed most attachment to freedom of sentiment." It must not, however, be forgotten, that Swift's attachment to his Church, as it influenced him against the Whigs, would naturally influence him against the deistical writers also, and that he must be credited, to that extent, with honesty of purpose. That these writers were Whigs was, if one may so put it, an accident, of which it would have been more than a human act for Swift not to take advantage, for party purposes.

Curiously enough, none of Swift's more modern biographers have thought this imitation of Collins's "Discourse" worthy of a mention; yet it is, in its way, as fine a performance as his castigation of Bishop Burnet and his "Introduction." The fooling is admirably carried on, and the intention, as explained in the introduction, is excellently well realized. It frightened Collins into Holland. To appreciate the cleverness with which it has been done, one should read Swift's "Abstract" side by side with Collins's "Discourse."

The pamphlet was advertised for sale in "The Examiner" for Tuesday, January 26th, 1712-13. In his "Letters to Stella" (January 16th and 21st, 1712-13), Swift makes the following references to it: "I came home at seven, and began a little whim which just came into my head, and will make a three-penny pamphlet. It shall be finished in a week; and, if it succeeds, you shall know what it is; otherwise not. . . . I was to-day with my printer, to give him a little pamphlet I have written; but not politics. It will be out by Monday."

The present text is based on that of the first edition, collated with those given by Nichols, Hawkesworth and Scott. None of the "Miscellanies" prints this tract, nor is it given in Faulkner's edition of 1735-38 (6 vols.). It is fully annotated and edited by Nichols in the first volume of his "Supplement to Swift's Works" (1779).

[T. S.]

Mr. *C——ns*'s DISCOURSE OF Free-Thinking,

Put into plain *Engliſh*, by way of

ABSTRACT,

FOR THE

Uſe of the Poor.

By a Friend of the AUTHOR.

LONDON,

Printed for *John Morphew*, near *Stationers-Hall*, 1713. Price 4 *d*.

MR. COLLINS'S DISCOURSE OF FREE-THINKING; PUT INTO PLAIN ENGLISH, BY WAY OF ABSTRACT, FOR THE USE OF THE POOR.

INTRODUCTION.

OUR party having failed, by all their political arguments, to re-establish their power; the wise leaders have determined, that the last and principal remedy should be made use of, for opening the eyes of this blinded nation; and that a short, but perfect, system of their divinity, should be published, to which we are all of us ready to subscribe, and which we lay down as a model, bearing a close analogy to our schemes in religion. Crafty, designing men, that they might keep the world in awe, have, in their several forms of government, placed a Supreme Power *on earth, to keep human-kind in fear of being hanged; and a supreme power in heaven, for fear of being damned. In order to cure men's apprehensions of the former, several of our learned members have writ many profound treatises on Anarchy; but a brief complete body of Atheology seemed yet wanting, till this irrefragable Discourse appeared. However, it so happens, that our ablest brethren, in their elaborate disquisitions upon this subject, have written with so much caution, that ignorant unbelievers have edified very little by them. I grant that those daring spirits, who first adventured to write against the direct rules of the gospel, the current of antiquity, the religion of the magistrate, and the laws of the land, had some measures to keep; and particularly when they railed at religion, were in the right to use little artful disguises, by which a jury could only find them guilty of abusing heathenism or popery. But the mystery is now revealed, that there is no such thing as*

mystery or revelation; and though our friends are out of place and power, yet we may have so much confidence in the present ministry, to be secure, that those who suffer so many free speeches against their sovereign and themselves, to pass unpunished, will never resent our expressing the freest thoughts against their religion; but think with Tiberius, that if there be a God, he is able enough to revenge any injuries done to himself, without expecting the civil power to interpose.[1]

By these reflections I was brought to think, that the most ingenious author of the Discourse upon Freethinking, in a letter to Somebody, Esq.; although he hath used less reserve than any of his predecessors, might yet have been more free and open. I considered, that several well-willers to infidelity, might be discouraged by a show of logic, and a multiplicity of quotations, scattered through his book, which to understandings of that size, might carry an appearance of something like book-learning, and consequently fright them from reading for their improvement: I could see no reason why these great discoveries should be hid from our youth of quality, who frequent White's and Tom's; why they should not be adapted to the capacities of the Kit-Cat and Hanover Clubs,[2] *who might then be able to read lectures on them to their several toasts: and it will be allowed on all hands, that nothing can sooner help to restore our abdicated cause, than a firm universal belief of the principles laid down by this sublime author.*

For I am sensible that nothing would more contribute to "the continuance of the war," and the restoration of the late ministry, than to have the doctrines delivered in this treatise well infused into the people. I have therefore compiled them into the following Abstract, wherein I have adhered to the very words of our author, only adding some few explanations of my own, where the terms happen to be too learned, and consequently a little beyond the comprehension of those for whom the work was principally intended, I mean the nobility and gentry of our

[1] Swift was evidently very fond of this reference, since he uses it several times in his writings. [T. S.]

[2] These were chocolate houses of the time, supported mainly by the aristocracy and the gamblers. White's is still in existence, and has had the honour of having had a special history written about it. Tom's was in Russell Street, and so-called after its landlord, Tom West. The Kit-Cat Club was the resort of the Whig wits of the day, and the Hanover Club of those who favoured the Hanover succession. [T. S.]

party. After which I hope it will be impossible for the malice of a Jacobite, highflying, priestridden faction, to misrepresent us. The few additions I have made are for no other use than to help the transition, which could not otherwise be kept in an abstract; but I have not presumed to advance anything of my own; which besides would be needless to an author who hath so fully handled and demonstrated every particular. I shall only add, that though this writer, when he speaks of priests, desires chiefly to be understood to mean the English clergy, yet he includes all priests whatsoever, except the ancient and modern heathens, the Turks, Quakers, and Socinians.

THE LETTER.

SIR,

I SEND you this apology for Freethinking,[1] without the least hopes of doing good, but purely to comply with your request; for those truths which nobody can deny, will do no good to those who deny them. The clergy, who are so impudent to teach the people the doctrines of faith, are all either cunning knaves or mad fools; for none but artificial, designing men, and crack-brained enthusiasts, presume to be guides to others in matters of speculation, which all the doctrines of Christianity are; and whoever has a mind to learn the Christian religion, naturally chooses such knaves and fools to teach them. Now the Bible, which contains the precepts of the priests' religion, is the most difficult book in the world to be understood; it requires a thorough knowledge in natural, civil, ecclesiastical history, law, husbandry, sailing, physic, pharmacy, mathematics, metaphysics, ethics, and everything else that can be named: And everybody who believes it ought to understand it, and must do so by force of his own freethinking, without any guide or instructor.

How can a man think at all, if he does not think freely? A man who does not eat and drink freely, does not eat and drink at all. Why may not I be denied the liberty of free-

[1] The chief strain of Collins's "Discourse" is an eulogium upon the necessity and advantage of Freethinking; in which it is more than insinuated that the advocates of revealed religion are enemies to the progress of enlightened inquiry. This insidious position is ridiculed in the following parody. [S.]

seeing, as well as freethinking? Yet nobody pretends that the first is unlawful, for a cat may look on a king; though you be near-sighted, or have weak or sore eyes, or are blind, you may be a free-seer; you ought to see for yourself, and not trust to a guide to choose the colour of your stockings, or save you from falling into a ditch.

In like manner, there ought to be no restraint at all on thinking freely upon any proposition, however impious or absurd. There is not the least hurt in the wickedest thoughts, provided they be free; nor in telling those thoughts to everybody, and endeavouring to convince the world of them; for all this is included in the doctrine of freethinking, as I shall plainly show you in what follows; and therefore you are all along to understand the word freethinking in this sense.

If you are apt to be afraid of the devil, think freely of him, and you destroy him and his kingdom. Freethinking has done him more mischief than all the clergy in the world ever could do; they believe in the devil, they have an interest in him, and therefore are the great supports of his kingdom. The devil was in the States-General before they began to be freethinkers. For England and Holland [1] were formerly the Christian territories of the devil; I told you how he left Holland; and freethinking and the revolution banished him from England; I defy all the clergy to shew me when they ever had such success against him. My meaning is, that to think freely of the devil, is to think there is no devil at all; and he that thinks so, the devil's in him if he be afraid of the devil.

But, within these two or three years, the devil has come into England again, and Dr Sacheverell [2] has given him commission to appear in the shape of a cat, and carry old women about upon broomsticks: And the devil has now so many "ministers ordained to his service," that they have rendered freethinking odious, and nothing but the second coming of Christ can restore it.

The priests tell me, I am to believe the Bible, but freethinking tells me otherwise in many particulars: The Bible says, the Jews were a nation favoured by God; but I who

[1] Collins is supposed to have imbibed his freethinking philosophy during his repeated visits to Holland. [S.]

[2] See note on p. 147.

am a freethinker say, that cannot be, because the Jews lived in a corner of the earth, and freethinking makes it clear, that those who live in corners cannot be favourites of God. The New Testament all along asserts the truth of Christianity, but freethinking denies it; because Christianity was communicated but to a few; and whatever is communicated but to a few, cannot be true; for that is like whispering, and the proverb says, that there is no whispering without lying.

Here is a society in London for propagating freethinking throughout the world, encouraged and supported by the Queen and many others. You say, perhaps, it is for propagating the Gospel. Do you think the missionaries we send will tell the heathens that they must not think freely? No, surely; why then, it is manifest, those missionaries must be freethinkers, and make the heathens so too. But why should not the king of Siam, whose religion is heathenism and idolatry, send over a parcel of his priests to convert us to his church, as well as we send missionaries there? Both projects are exactly of a piece, and equally reasonable; and if those heathen priests were here, it would be our duty to hearken to them, and think freely whether they may not be in the right rather than we. I heartily wish a detachment of such divines as Dr Atterbury, Dr Smallridge,[1] Dr Swift, Dr Sacheverell, and some others, were sent every year to the farthest part of the heathen world, and that we had a cargo of their priests in return, who would spread freethinking among us; then the war would go on, the late ministry be restored, and faction cease, which our priests inflame by haranguing upon texts, and falsely call that preaching the Gospel.

I have another project in my head, which ought to be put in execution, in order to make us freethinkers: It is a great hardship and injustice, that our priests must not be disturbed while they are prating in the pulpit. For example: Why should not William Penn the Quaker, or any Anabaptist, Papist, Muggletonian, Jew, or Sweet-Singer,[2] have liberty to

[1] Dr. Smallridge, it will be remembered, was the gentleman who indignantly denied the authorship of "A Tale of a Tub" (see vol. i. of this edition). He became Bishop of Bristol in 1714, and died in 1719. His style was well thought of at the time. [T. S.]

[2] The Sweet-Singers were a fanatical sect of wailers, founded in Scotland, but which had no long life. [T. S.]

come into St Paul's Church, in the midst of divine service, and endeavour to convert first the aldermen, then the preacher, and singing-men? Or pray, why might not poor Mr Whiston,[1] who denies the divinity of Christ, be allowed to come into the Lower House of Convocation, and convert the clergy? But, alas! we are overrun with such false notions, that, if Penn or Whiston should do their duty, they would be reckoned fanatics, and disturbers of the holy synod, although they have as good a title to it as St Paul had to go into the synagogues of the Jews; and their authority is full as divine as his.

Christ himself commands us to be freethinkers; for he bids us search the scriptures, and take heed what and whom we hear; by which he plainly warns us, not to believe our bishops and clergy; for Jesus Christ, when he considered that all the Jewish and heathen priests, whose religion he came to abolish, were his enemies, rightly concluded that those appointed by him to preach his own gospel, would probably be so too; and could not be secure, that any set of priests, of the faith he delivered, would ever be otherwise; therefore it is fully demonstrated that the clergy of the Church of England are mortal enemies to Christ, and ought not to be believed.

But, without the privilege of freethinking, how is it possible to know which is the right Scripture? Here are perhaps twenty sorts of Scriptures in the several parts of the world, and every set of priests contend that their Scripture is the true one. The Indian Brahmins have a book of scripture called the Shaster; the Persees their Zundivastaw;[2] the Bonzes in China have theirs, written by the disciples of Fo-he, whom they call *God and Saviour of the world, who was born to teach the way of salvation, and to give satisfaction for all men's sins:* which, you see, is directly the same with what our priests pretend of Christ. And must we not think

[1] Yet Whiston, who receives this side-cut, was himself an anxious combatant of Collins, in his "Reflections on an Anonymous Pamphlet, entitled, 'A Defence of Freethinking.'" 1713. [S.]

[2] Swift means here, of course, the Zendavesta, the commentaries on the sacred books of the Parsees. Not that Swift could have known much of these Oriental religions; but the names were good enough for his purpose. [T. S.]

freely, to find out which are in the right, whether the Bishops or the Bonzes? But the Talapoins, or heathen clergy of Siam, approach yet nearer to the system of our priests; they have a Book of Scripture written by Sommonocodam, who, the Siamese say, was "born of a virgin," and was "the God expected by the Universe;" just as our priests tell us, that Jesus Christ was born of the Virgin Mary, and was the Messiah so long expected. The Turkish priests, or dervises, have their Scripture which they call the Alcoran. The Jews have the Old Testament for their Scripture, and the Christians have both the Old and the New. Now among all these Scriptures, there cannot above one be right; and how is it possible to know which is that, without reading them all, and then thinking freely, every one of us for ourselves, without following the advice or instruction of any guide, before we venture to choose? The parliament ought to be at the charge of finding a sufficient number of these Scriptures, for every one of Her Majesty's subjects, for there are twenty to one against us, that we may be in the wrong: But a great deal of freethinking will at last set us all right, and every one will adhere to the Scripture he likes best; by which means, religion, peace, and wealth, will be for ever secured in Her Majesty's realms.

And it is the more necessary that the good people of England should have liberty to choose some other Scripture, because all Christian priests differ so much about the copies of theirs, and about the various readings of the several manuscripts, which quite destroys the authority of the Bible: for what authority can a book pretend to, where there are various readings?[1] And for this reason, it is manifest that no man can know the opinions of Aristotle or Plato, or believe the facts related by Thucydides or Livy, or be pleased with the poetry of Homer and Virgil, all which books are utterly useless, upon account of their various readings. Some books of Scripture are said to be lost, and this utterly destroys the credit of those that are left: some we reject, which the Africans and Copticks receive; and why may we not think freely, and reject the rest? Some think

[1] In the discourse on "Freethinking," p. 80, Collins insists much on a passage in Victor of Tunis, from which he infers, that the Gospels were corrected and altered in the fourth century. [S.]

the scriptures wholly inspired, some partly; and some not at all. Now this is just the very case of the Bramins, Persees, Bonzes, Talapoins, Dervises, Rabbis, and all other priests, who build their religion upon books, as our priests do upon their Bibles; they all equally differ about the copies, various readings and inspirations, of their several Scriptures, and God knows which are in the right: Free-thinking alone can determine it.

It would be endless to show in how many particulars the priests of the Heathen and Christian churches, differ about the meaning even of those Scriptures which they universally receive as sacred. But, to avoid prolixity, I shall confine myself to the different opinions among the priests of the Church of England, and here only give you a specimen, because even these are too many to be enumerated.

I have found out a bishop, (though indeed his opinions are condemned by all his brethren,) who allows the Scriptures to be so difficult, that God has left them rather as a trial of our industry than a repository of our faith, and furniture of creeds and articles of belief; with several other admirable schemes of freethinking, which you may consult at your leisure.

The doctrine of the Trinity is the most fundamental point of the whole Christian religion. Nothing is more easy to a freethinker, yet what different notions of it do the English priests pretend to deduce from Scripture, explaining it by "specific unities, eternal modes of subsistence," and the like unintelligible jargon? Nay, it is a question whether this doctrine be fundamental or no; for though Dr South and Bishop Bull affirm it, yet Bishop Taylor and Dr Wallis deny it.[1] And that excellent freethinking prelate, Bishop Taylor,

[1] Dr. Robert South (1633-1716), rector of Islip. The reference by Swift is to his controversy with Sherlock on the doctrine of the Trinity. The two disputants got into such depths that both were charged with heresy.

Dr. George Bull (1634-1710), Bishop of St. David's, wrote the "Defensio Fidei Nicenæ." For his exposition of the necessity for the belief in the divinity of the Son of God he received the thanks of Bossuet.

Dr. Jeremy Taylor, Bishop of Down and Connor (1613-1667), and author of "Holy Living" and "Holy Dying," wrote also "Unum Necessarium, or the Doctrine and Practice of Repentance." His treatment, in this work, of the doctrine of original sin was considered

observes, that Athanasius's example was followed with too much greediness; by which means it has happened, that the greater number of our priests are in that sentiment, and think it necessary to believe the Trinity, and incarnation of Christ.[1]

Our priests likewise dispute several circumstances about the resurrection of the dead, the nature of our bodies after the resurrection, and in what manner they shall be united to our souls. They also attack one another "very weakly with great vigour," about predestination. And it is certainly true, (for Bishop Taylor and Mr Whiston the Socinian say so,) that all churches in prosperity alter their doctrines every age, and are neither satisfied with themselves, nor their own confessions; neither does any clergyman of sense believe the Thirty-nine Articles.

Our priests differ about the eternity of hell torments. The famous Dr Henry More,[2] and the most pious and rational of all priests, Dr Tillotson,[3] (both freethinkers,) believe them to be not eternal. They differ about keeping the sabbath, the divine right of episcopacy, and the doctrine of original sin; which is the foundation of the whole Christian religion; for if men are not liable to be damned for Adam's sin, the Christian religion is an imposture: Yet this is now disputed among them; so is lay baptism; so was formerly the lawfulness of usury, but now the priests are common stock-jobbers, attorneys, and scriveners. In short there is no end of

heterodox by Bishop Warner and Dr. Sanderson, and a controversy ensued, in the course of which Taylor was imprisoned in Chepstow Castle on a charge of being concerned in a Royalist insurrection.

Dr. John Wallis (1616-1703), here referred to, is the famous mathematician and divine, and one of the original members of the Royal Society. He is mentioned in the text by Swift because of a work he published on the Trinity, which brought him into collision with the Arians. But the Doctor seems to have been addicted to views of a controversial nature, for his opinions on infant baptism and the keeping of the Sabbath found many objectors. He was Savilian Professor of Geometry at Oxford in 1648. [T. S.]

[1] See Swift's opinion of controversies on this subject in his "Sermon upon the Trinity." [S.]

[2] Dr. Henry More (1614-1687), the Platonist theologian, wrote a philosophical poem entitled, "Psycho-Zoia, or the Life of the Soul" (1640). [T.S.]

[3] Dr. John Tillotson (1630-1694) succeeded Sancroft as Archbishop of Canterbury. He published some eloquent sermons and several controversial tracts against Catholicism. [T. S.]

disputing among priests, and therefore I conclude, that there ought to be no such thing in the world as priests, teachers, or guides, for instructing ignorant people in religion; but that every man ought to think freely for himself.

I will tell you the meaning in all this; the priests dispute every point in the Christian religion, as well as almost every text in the Bible; and the force of my argument lies here, that whatever point is disputed by one or two divines, however condemned by the Church, not only that particular point, but the whole article to which it relates, may lawfully be received or rejected by any freethinker. For instance, suppose More and Tillotson deny the eternity of hell torments, a freethinker may deny all future punishments whatsoever. The priests dispute about explaining the Trinity; therefore a freethinker may reject one or two, or the whole three persons; at least he may reject Christianity, because the Trinity is the most fundamental doctrine of that religion. So I affirm original sin, and that men are now liable to be damned for Adam's sin, to be the foundation of the whole Christian religion; but this point was formerly, and is now disputed, therefore, a freethinker may deny the whole. And I cannot help giving you one farther direction, how I insinuate all along, that the wisest freethinking priests, whom you may distinguish by the epithets I bestow them, were those who differed most from the generality of their brethren.

But besides, the conduct of our priests in many other points, makes freethinking unavoidable; for some of them own, that the doctrines of the Church are contradictory to one another, as well as to reason; which I thus prove: Dr Sacheverell says in his speech at his trial, That by abandoning passive obedience we must render ourselves the most inconsistent Church in the world: Now 'tis plain, that one inconsistency could not make the most inconsistent Church in the world; *ergo*, there must have been a great many inconsistencies and contradictory doctrines in the Church before. Dr South describes the incarnation of Christ, as an astonishing mystery, impossible to be conceived by man's reason; *ergo*, it is contradictory to itself, and to reason, and ought to be exploded by all freethinkers.

Another instance of the priests' conduct, which multiplies freethinkers, is their acknowledgment of abuses, defects, and

false doctrines, in the Church; particularly that of eating black pudding,[1] which is so plainly forbid in the Old and New Testament, that I wonder those who pretend to believe a syllable in either will presume to taste it. Why should I mention the want of discipline, and of a sideboard at the altar, with complaints of other great abuses and defects made by some of the priests, which no man can think on without freethinking, and consequently rejecting Christianity?

When I see an honest freethinking bishop endeavour to destroy the power and privileges of the Church, and Dr Atterbury angry with him for it, and calling it "dirty work," what can I conclude, by virtue of being a freethinker, but that Christianity is all a cheat?

Mr Whiston has published several tracts, wherein he absolutely denies the divinity of Christ: A bishop tells him, "Sir, in any matter where you have the Church's judgment against you, you should be careful not to break the peace of the Church, by writing against it, though you are sure you are in the right."[2] Now my opinion is directly contrary; and I affirm, that if ten thousand freethinkers thought differently from the received doctrine, and from each other, they would be all in duty bound to publish their thoughts (provided they were all sure of being in the right) though it broke the peace of the Church and state ten thousand times.

And here I must take leave to tell you, although you cannot but have perceived it from what I have already said, and shall be still more amply convinced by what is to follow; that freethinking signifies nothing, without freespeaking and freewriting. It is the indispensable duty of a freethinker, to endeavour forcing all the world to think as he does, and by that means make them freethinkers too. You are also to understand, that I allow no man to be a freethinker, any further than as he differs from the received doctrines of religion. Where a man falls in, though by perfect chance,

[1] Collins in his pamphlet quotes a Dr. Grabe, who, following the Jewish code of rules as regards food, considered the eating of blood one of the points on which the Church did not insist against. In the text Swift ridicules this in the reference to "black pudding." [T. S.]

[2] Swift's "Sermon on the Trinity," as well as a passage in his "Thoughts upon Religion," shews the weight which he attached to this important argument. [S.]

with what is generally believed, he is in that point a confined and limited thinker; and you shall see by and by, that I celebrate those for the noblest freethinkers in every age, who differed from the religion of their countries in the most fundamental points, and especially in those which bear any analogy to the chief fundamentals of religion among us.

Another trick of the priests is, to charge all men with atheism, who have more wit than themselves; which therefore I expect will be my case for writing this discourse: This is what makes them so implacable against Mr Gildon, Dr Tindal, Mr Toland,[1] and myself, and when they call us wits, atheists, it provokes us to be freethinkers.

Again; the priests cannot agree when their Scripture was written. They differ about the number of canonical books, and the various readings. Now those few among us who understand Latin, are careful to tell this to our disciples, who presently fall a-freethinking, that the Bible is a book not to be depended upon in anything at all.

There is another thing, that mightily spreads freethinking, which I believe you would hardly guess. The priests have got a way of late of writing books against freethinking; I mean treatises in dialogue, where they introduce atheists, deists, sceptics, and Socinians offering their several arguments. Now these freethinkers are too hard for the priests themselves in their own books; and how can it be otherwise? For if the arguments usually offered by atheists, are fairly represented in these books, they must needs convert everybody that reads them; because atheists, deists, sceptics, and Socinians, have certainly better arguments to maintain their opinions, than any the priests can produce to maintain the contrary.

Mr Creech,[2] a priest, translated Lucretius into English, which is a complete system of atheism; and several young students, who were afterwards priests, wrote verses in praise of this translation. The arguments against Providence in that book are so strong, that they have added mightily to the number of freethinkers.

Why should I mention the pious cheats of the priests,

[1] See notes on pp. 9, 79, 80, 82.

[2] This is Thomas Creech, the translator of Horace, to whom Swift refers in "The Battle of the Books" (see vol. i. p. 180). The translation of Lucretius was published in English verse in 1682. [T. S.]

who in the New Testament translate the word *ecclesia* sometimes the *church*, and sometimes the *congregation;* and *episcopus*, sometimes a *bishop*, and sometimes an *overseer?* A priest,[1] translating a book, left out a whole passage that reflected on the king, by which he was an enemy to political freethinking, a most considerable branch of our system. Another priest, translating a book of travels,[2] left out a lying miracle, out of mere malice, to conceal an argument for freethinking. In short, these frauds are very common in all books which are published by priests: But however, I love to excuse them whenever I can: And as to this accusation, they may plead the authority of the ancient fathers of the Church, for forgery, corruption, and mangling of authors, with more reason than for any of their articles of faith. St Jerom, St Hilary, Eusebius Vercellensis, Victorinus,[3] and several others, were all guilty of arrant forgery and corruption: For when they translated the works of several freethinkers, whom they called heretics, they omitted all their heresies or freethinkings, and had the impudence to own it to the world.

From these many notorious instances of the priests' conduct, I conclude they are not to be relied on in any one

[1] Collins refers to the Rev. Mr. Brown, who translated Father Paul's "Letters," and omitted the words, "If the King of England [James I.] were not more a doctor than a king."

[2] Baumgarten's "Travels." [T. S.]

[3] Jerome, or St. Hieronymus (*circa* 340-420), wrote the Latin vulgate translation of the Scriptures. Is accepted as one of the Fathers of the Church.

St. Hilary, another accepted Father, was bishop of Poictiers. He died 367 or 368.

The Eusebius here named was Bishop of Vercelli, a city of Liguria. He flourished about A.D. 360, and distinguished himself at the Council of Milan in A.D. 355, for his attacks against Arianism. He was exiled to Upper Thebais, with several other bishops who refused to subscribe to the condemnation of Athanasius; but was recalled with Lucifer, bishop of Cagliari, Sardinia. In conjunction with Athanasius he attended an Alexandrian synod which declared the Trinity consubstantial. He travelled much in the Eastern provinces and Italy, engaging in missionary work. He died about A.D. 373.

Fabius Marius Victorinus was born in Africa, and died at Rome in 370. He was a distinguished orator, grammarian, and rhetorician. His chief work was a treatise entitled "De Orthographia." He also wrote many theological books. [T.S.]

thing relating to religion; but that every man must think freely for himself.

But to this it may be objected, that the bulk of mankind is as well qualified for flying as thinking, and if every man thought it his duty to think freely, and trouble his neighbour with his thoughts (which is an essential part of free-thinking,) it would make wild work in the world. I answer; whoever cannot think freely, may let it alone if he pleases, by virtue of his right to think freely; that is to say, if such a man freely thinks that he cannot think freely, of which every man is a sufficient judge, why, then, he need not think freely, unless he thinks fit.

Besides, if the bulk of mankind cannot think freely in matters of speculation, as the being of a God, the immortality of the soul, &c. why then, freethinking is indeed no duty: But then the priests must allow, that men are not concerned to believe whether there is a God or no. But still those who are disposed to think freely, may think freely if they please.

It is again objected, that freethinking will produce endless divisions in opinion, and by consequence disorder society. To which I answer;

When every single man comes to have a different opinion every day from the whole world, and from himself, by virtue of freethinking, and thinks it his duty to convert every man to his own freethinking (as all we freethinkers do) how can that possibly create so great a diversity of opinions, as to have a set of priests agree among themselves to teach the same opinions in their several parishes to all who will come to hear them? Besides, if all people were of the same opinion, the remedy would be worse than the disease; I will tell you the reason some other time.

Besides, difference in opinion, especially in matters of great moment, breeds no confusion at all. Witness Papist and Protestant, Roundhead and Cavalier, Whig and Tory, now among us. I observe, the Turkish empire is more at peace within itself, than Christian princes are with one another. Those noble Turkish virtues of charity and toleration, are what contribute chiefly to the flourishing state of that happy monarchy. There Christians and Jews are tolerated, and live at ease, if they can hold their tongues and

think freely, provided they never set foot within the mosques, nor write against Mahomet: A few plunderings now and then by the janissaries are all they have to fear.

It is objected, that by freethinking, men will think themselves into atheism; and indeed I have allowed all along, that atheistical books convert men to freethinking. But suppose that to be true; I can bring you two divines who affirm superstition and enthusiasm to be worse than atheism, and more mischievous to society, and in short it is necessary that the bulk of the people should be atheists or superstitious.

It is objected, that priests ought to be relied on by the people, as lawyers and physicians, because it is their faculty.

I answer, 'Tis true, a man who is no lawyer is not suffered to plead for himself; but every man may be his own quack if he pleases, and he only ventures his life; but in the other case the priest tells him he must be damned: Therefore do not trust the priest, but think freely for yourself, and if you happen to think there is no hell, there certainly is none, and consequently you cannot be damned; I answer further, that wherever there is no lawyer, physician, or priest, the country is paradise. Besides, all priests, (except the orthodox, and those are not ours, nor any that I know,) are hired by the public to lead men into mischief; but lawyers and physicians are not, you hire them yourself.

It is objected, (by priests no doubt, but I have forgot their names,) that false speculations are necessary to be imposed upon men, in order to assist the magistrate in keeping the peace, and that men ought therefore to be deceived, like children, for their own good. I answer, that zeal for imposing speculations, whether true or false (under which name of speculations I include all opinions of religion, as the belief of a God, Providence, immortality of the soul, future rewards and punishments, &c.) has done more hurt than it is possible for religion to do good. It puts us to the charge of maintaining ten thousand priests in England, which is a burden upon society never felt upon any other occasion; and a greater evil to the public than if these ecclesiastics were only employed in the most innocent offices of life, which I take to be eating and drinking. Now if you offer to impose anything on mankind besides what relates to moral duties, as to pay your debts, not pick pockets, nor commit murder, and the

like; that is to say, if, besides this, you oblige them to believe in God and Jesus Christ, what you add to their faith will take just so much off from their morality. By this argument it is manifest, that a perfect moral man must be a perfect atheist; every inch of religion he gets loses him an inch of morality: For there is a certain *quantum* belongs to every man, of which there is nothing to spare. This is clear from the common practice of all our priests, they never once preach to you to love your neighbour, to be just in your dealings, or to be sober and temperate. The streets of London are full of common whores, publicly tolerated in their wickedness; yet the priests make no complaints against this enormity, either from the pulpit or the press: I can affirm, that neither you nor I, sir, have ever heard one sermon against whoring since we were boys. No, the priests allow all these vices, and love us the better for them, provided we will promise not "to harangue upon a text," nor to sprinkle a little water in a child's face, which they call baptizing, and would engross it all to themselves.

Besides, the priests engage all the rogues, villains, and fools in their party, in order to make it as large as they can: By this means they seduced Constantine the Great[1] over to their religion, who was the first Christian emperor, and so horrible a villain, that the heathen priests told him they could not expiate his crimes in their church; so he was at a loss to know what to do, till an Ægyptian bishop assured him, that there was no villainy so great, but was to be expiated by the sacraments of the Christian religion; upon which he became a Christian, and to him that religion owes its first settlement.

It is objected, that freethinkers themselves are the most infamous, wicked, and senseless of all mankind.

I answer, first, we say the same of priests, and other believers. But the truth is, men of all sects are equally good and bad; for no religion whatsoever contributes in the least to mend men's lives.

I answer, secondly, that freethinkers use their understanding, but those who have religion do not; therefore the first

[1] The reference here is to the luminous cross which Constantine said he saw in the heavens, and which influenced him to embrace Christianity. [T. S.]

have more understanding than the others; witness Toland, Tindal, Gildon, Clendon,[1] Coward, and myself. For, use legs and have legs.

I answer, thirdly, that freethinkers are the most virtuous persons in the world; for all freethinkers must certainly differ from the priests, and from nine hundred ninety-nine of a thousand of those among whom they live; and are therefore virtuous of course, because everybody hates them.

I answer, fourthly, that the most virtuous people in all ages have been freethinkers; of which I shall produce several instances.[2]

Socrates was a freethinker; for he disbelieved the gods of his country, and the common creeds about them, and declared his dislike when he heard men attribute "repentance, anger, and other passions to the gods, and talk of wars and battles in heaven, and of the gods getting women with child," and such like fabulous and blasphemous stories. I pick out these particulars, because they are the very same with what the priests have in their Bibles, where repentance and anger are attributed to God; where it is said, there was "war in heaven;" and that "the Virgin Mary was with child by the Holy Ghost," whom the priests call God; all fabulous and blasphemous stories. Now, I affirm Socrates to have been a true Christian. You will ask, perhaps, how that can be, since he lived three or four hundred years before Christ? I answer, with Justin Martyr, that Christ is nothing else but reason, and I hope you do not think Socrates lived before reason. Now, this true Christian Socrates never made notions, speculations, or mysteries, any part of his religion, but demonstrated all men to be fools who troubled themselves with enquiries into heavenly things. Lastly, 'tis plain

[1] John Clendon, of the Middle Temple, published in 1709-1710, "Tractatus Philosophico-Theologicus de Persona; or, a Treatise of the Word Person." This singular book appears to have been written principally to prove that the doctrine of the Trinity was very well explained by an Act of Parliament, 9 and 10 Will. III. It was complained of in the House of Commons, March 25th, 1710, and was judged to be a scandalous, seditious, and blasphemous libel . . . . and was burnt by the common hangman at the same time with Tindal's "Rights." [N.]

[2] What follows is in ridicule of a long list of freethinkers, as he calls them, with which Collins has graced his discourse; in which he includes not only the ancient philosophers, but the inspired prophets, and even "King Solomon the wise." [S.]

that Socrates was a freethinker, because he was calumniated for an atheist, as freethinkers generally are, only because he was an enemy to all speculations and inquiries into heavenly things. For I argue thus, that if I never trouble myself to think whether there be a God or no, and forbid others to do it, I am a freethinker, but not an atheist.

Plato was a freethinker, and his notions are so like some in the Gospel, that a heathen charged Christ with borrowing his doctrine from Plato. But Origen[1] defends Christ very well against this charge, by saying he did not understand Greek, and therefore could not borrow his doctrine from Plato. However their two religions agreed so well, that it was common for Christians to turn Platonists, and Platonists Christians. When the Christians found out this, one of their zealous priests (worse than any atheist) forged several things under Plato's name, but conformable to Christianity, by which the heathens were fraudulently converted.

Epicurus was the greatest of all freethinkers, and consequently the most virtuous man in the world. His opinions in religion were the most complete system of atheism that ever appeared. Christians ought to have the greatest veneration for him, because he taught a higher point of virtue than Christ; I mean the virtue of friendship, which in the sense we usually understand it, is not so much as named in the New Testament.

Plutarch was a freethinker, notwithstanding his being a priest; but indeed he was a heathen priest. His freethinking appears by showing the innocence of atheism, (which at worst is only false reasoning,) and the mischiefs of superstition; and explains what superstition is, by calling it a conceit of immortal ills after death, the opinion of hell torments, dreadful aspects, doleful groans, and the like. He is likewise very satirical upon the public forms of devotion in his own country (a qualification absolutely necessary to a freethinker) yet those forms which he ridicules, are the very same that now pass for true worship in almost all countries: I am sure

[1] Origen, a Father of the Church, was born about 185. He carried to extremes the celibate life taught in the Gospel; and his "Treatise against Celsus" contains, according to St. Jerome and Eusebius, the refutation of "all the objections which have been made, and all which ever will be made against Christianity." [T. S.]

some of them do so in ours; such as abject looks, distortions, wry faces, beggarly tones, humiliation, and contrition.

Varro,[1] the most learned among the Romans, was a freethinker; for he said, the heathen divinity contained many fables below the dignity of immortal beings; such, for instance, as Gods BEGOTTEN and PROCEEDING from other Gods. These two words I desire you will particularly remark, because they are the very terms made use of by our priests in their doctrine of the Trinity: He says likewise, that there are many things false in religion, and so say all freethinkers; but then he adds; "which the vulgar ought not to know, but it is expedient they should believe." In this last he indeed discovers the whole secret of a statesman and politician, by denying the vulgar the privilege of freethinking, and here I differ from him. However, it is manifest from hence, that the Trinity was an invention of statesmen and politicians.

The grave and wise Cato the censor will for ever live in that noble freethinking saying—"I wonder," said he, "how one of our priests can forbear laughing when he sees another!" (For contempt of priests is another grand characteristic of a freethinker). This shews that Cato understood the whole mystery of the Roman religion "as by law established." I beg you, sir, not to overlook these last words, "religion as by law established." I translate *haruspex*, into the general word, *priest*. Thus I apply the sentence to our priests in England, and, when Dr. Smallridge sees Dr Atterbury, I wonder how either of them can forbear laughing at the cheat they put upon the people, by making them believe their "religion as by law established."

Cicero, that consummate philosopher, and noble patriot, though he was a priest, and consequently more likely to be a knave; gave the greatest proofs of his freethinking. First, he professed the sceptic philosophy, which doubts of everything. Then, he wrote two treatises;[2] in the first, he shews the weakness of the Stoics' arguments for the being of the

[1] Marcus Terentius Varro (born B.C. 117) was the friend of Cicero. He was a profound grammarian, historian, and philosopher. The expression Swift applies to him as "the most learned among the Romans" is one by which he is generally called. [T. S.]

[2] "De Natura Deorum." [T. S.]

Gods: In the latter, he has destroyed the whole revealed religion of the Greeks and Romans (for why should not theirs be a revealed religion as well as that of Christ?) Cicero likewise tells us, as his own opinion, that they who study philosophy, do not believe there are any Gods: He denies the immortality of the soul, and says, there can be nothing after death.

And because the priests have the impudence to quote Cicero in their pulpits and pamphlets, against freethinking; I am resolved to disarm them of his authority. You must know, his philosophical works are generally in dialogues, where people are brought in disputing against one another: Now the priests when they see an argument to prove a God, offered perhaps by a Stoic, are such knaves or blockheads, to quote it as if it were Cicero's own; whereas Cicero was so noble a freethinker, that he believed nothing at all of the matter, nor ever shews the least inclination to favour superstition, or the belief of a God, and the immortality of the soul; unless what he throws out sometimes to save himself from danger, in his speeches to the Roman mob; whose religion was, however, much more innocent and less absurd, than that of popery at least: And I could say more—but you understand me.

Seneca was a great freethinker, and had a noble notion of the worship of the gods, for which our priests would call any man an atheist: He laughs at morning devotions, or worshipping upon Sabbath-days; he says God has no need of ministers and servants, because he himself serves mankind. This religious man, like his religious brethren the Stoics, denies the immortality of the soul, and says, all that is feigned to be so terrible in hell, is but a fable: Death puts an end to all our misery, &c. Yet the priests were anciently so fond of Seneca, that they forged a correspondence of letters between him and St. Paul.

Solomon himself, whose writings are called "the word of God," was such a freethinker, that if he were now alive, nothing but his building of churches could have kept our priests from calling him an atheist. He affirms the eternity of the world almost in the same manner with Manilius,[1] the

[1] Marcus Manilius, who probably flourished under Theodosius the Great, was a Latin poet, who wrote a poem entitled "Astronomica." [T.S.]

heathen philosophical poet, (which opinion entirely overthrows the history of the creation by Moses, and all the New Testament): He denies the immortality of the soul, assures us that men die like beasts, and that both go to one place.

The prophets of the Old Testament were generally freethinkers: you must understand, that their way of learning to prophesy was by music and drinking.[1] These prophets writ against the established religion of the Jews, (which those people looked upon as the institution of God himself,) as if they believed it was all a cheat: that is to say, with as great liberty against the priests and prophets of Israel, as Dr. Tindal did lately against the priests and prophets of our Israel, who has clearly shewn them and their religion to be cheats. To prove this, you may read several passages in Isaiah, Ezekiel, Amos, Jeremiah, &c., wherein you will find such instances of freethinking, that, if any Englishman had talked so in our days, their opinions would have been registered in Dr. Sacheverell's trial, and in the representation of the Lower House of Convocation, and produced as so many proofs of the profaneness, blasphemy, and atheism of the nation; there being nothing more profane, blasphemous, or atheistical in those representations, than what these prophets have spoke, whose writings are yet called by our priests, "the word of God." And therefore these prophets are as much atheists as myself, or as any of my freethinking brethren whom I lately named to you.

Josephus was a great freethinker: I wish he had chosen a better subject to write on, than those ignorant, barbarous, ridiculous scoundrels, the Jews, whom God (if we may believe the priests) thought fit to choose for his own people. I will give you some instances of his freethinking. He says, Cain travelled through several countries, and kept company with rakes and profligate fellows; he corrupted the simplicities

[1] Collins, after making the charge, which has been repeated by all freethinkers down to Thomas Paine, that the prophets acquired their fervour of spirit by the aid of music and wine, allows, nevertheless, that they were great freethinkers, and "writ with as great liberty against the established religion of the Jews, which the people looked on as the institution of God himself, as if they looked upon it all to be imposture." —*Discourse*, p. 153, *et sequen.* [S.]

of former times, &c., which plainly supposes men before Adam, and consequently that the priests' history of the creation by Moses, is an imposture. He says, the Israelites' passing through the Red Sea, was no more than Alexander's passing at the Pamphilian sea; that as for the appearance of God at Mount Sinai, the reader may believe it as he pleases; that Moses persuaded the Jews he had God for his guide, just as the Greeks pretended they had their laws from Apollo. These are noble strains of freethinking, which the priests knew not how to solve, but by thinking as freely: For one of them says, that Josephus writ this to make his work acceptable to the heathens, by striking out everything that was incredible.

Origen, who was the first Christian that had any learning, has left a noble testimony of his freethinking; for a general council has determined him to be damned; which plainly shews he was a freethinker, and was no saint; for people were only sainted because of their want of learning and excess of zeal; so that all the fathers, who are called saints by the priests, were worse than atheists.

Minutius Felix[1] seems to be a true modern latitudinarian, freethinking Christian; for he is against altars, churches, public preaching, and public assemblies; and likewise against priests; for, he says, there were several great flourishing empires before there were any orders of priests in the world.

Synesius,[2] who had too much learning and too little zeal for a saint, was for some time a great freethinker; he could not believe the resurrection till he was made a bishop, and then pretended to be convinced by a lying miracle.

To come to our own country: My Lord Bacon was a great freethinker, when he tells us, that whatever has the least relation to religion, is particularly liable to suspicion; by which he seems to suspect all the facts whereon most of the superstitions (that is to say, what the priests call the

[1] Marcus Minutius Felix is said to have been born in Africa. He flourished in the third century, and wrote a defence of Christianity, in dialogue form, entitled, "Octavius." The work has been translated into English by Lord Hailes. [T. S.]

[2] Synesius of Cyrene, born 379, is the Platonic philosopher who became Bishop of Ptolemais. [T. S.]

religions) of the world are grounded. He also prefers atheism before superstition.

Mr. Hobbes was a person of great learning, virtue, and freethinking, except in the high church politics.

But Archbishop Tillotson is the person whom all English freethinkers own as their head; and his virtue is indisputable for this manifest reason; that Dr Hickes, a priest, calls him an atheist; says, he caused several to turn atheists, and to ridicule the priesthood and religion. These must be allowed to be noble effects of freethinking. This great prelate assures us, that all the duties of the Christian religion, with respect to God, are no other but what natural light prompts men to, except the two sacraments, and praying to God in the name and mediation of Christ. As a priest and prelate, he was obliged to say something of Christianity; but pray observe, sir, how he brings himself off. He justly affirms that even these things are of less moment than natural duties; and because mothers' nursing their children is a natural duty, it is of more moment than the two sacraments, or than praying to God in the name and by the mediation of Christ. This freethinking archbishop could not allow a miracle sufficient to give credit to a prophet who taught anything contrary to our natural notions: By which it is plain, he rejected at once all the mysteries of Christianity.

I could name one-and-twenty more great men, who were all freethinkers; but that I fear to be tedious: For, 'tis certain that all men of sense depart from the opinions commonly received; and are consequently more or less men of sense, according as they depart more or less from the opinions commonly received; neither can you name an enemy to freethinking, however he be dignified or distinguished, whether archbishop, bishop, priest, or deacon, who has not been either "a crack-brained enthusiast, a diabolical villain, or a most profound ignorant brute."

Thus, sir, I have endeavoured to execute your commands, and you may print this Letter, if you please; but I would have you conceal my name. For my opinion of virtue is, that we ought not to venture doing ourselves harm, by endeavouring to do good.

I am yours, &c.

I have here given the public a brief, but faithful abstract of this most excellent Essay; wherein I have all along religiously adhered to our author's notions, and generally to his words, without any other addition than that of explaining a few necessary consequences, for the sake of ignorant readers; for, to those who have the least degree of learning, I own they will be wholly useless. I hope I have not, in any single instance, misrepresented the thoughts of this admirable writer. If I have happened to mistake through inadvertency, I entreat he will condescend to inform me, and point out the place, upon which I will immediately beg pardon both of him and the world. The design of his piece is to recommend freethinking, and one chief motive is the example of many excellent men who were of that sect. He produces as the principal points of their freethinking; that they denied the Being of a God, the Torments of Hell, the Immortality of the Soul, the Trinity, Incarnation, the history of the creation by Moses, with many other such "fabulous and blasphemous stories," as he judiciously calls them: And he asserts, that whoever denies the most of these, is the completest freethinker, and consequently the wisest and most virtuous man. The author, sensible of the prejudices of the age, does not directly affirm himself an atheist; he goes no further than to pronounce that atheism is the most perfect degree of freethinking; and leaves the reader to form the conclusion. However, he seems to allow, that a man may be a tolerable freethinker, though he does believe a God; provided he utterly rejects "Providence, Revelation, the Old and New Testament, Future Rewards and Punishments, the Immortality of the Soul," and other the like impossible absurdities. Which mark of superabundant caution, sacrificing truth to the superstition of priests, may perhaps be forgiven, but ought not to be imitated by any who would arrive (even in this author's judgment) at the true perfection of freethinking.

SOME THOUGHTS

ON

FREETHINKING.

WRITTEN IN ENGLAND, BUT LEFT UNFINISHED.

DISCOURSING one day with a prelate of the kingdom of Ireland, who is a person of excellent wit and learning, he offered a notion applicable to the subject we were then upon, which I took to be altogether new and right. He said, that the difference betwixt a madman and one in his wits, in what related to speech, consisted in this; that the former spoke out whatever came into his mind, and just in the confused manner as his imagination presented the ideas: The latter only expressed such thoughts as his judgment directed him to choose, leaving the rest to die away in his memory; and that, if the wisest man would, at any time, utter his thoughts in the crude indigested manner as they come into his head, he would be looked upon as raving mad. And, indeed, when we consider our thoughts, as they are the seeds of words and actions, we cannot but agree that they ought to be kept under the strictest regulation; and that in the great multiplicity of ideas which one's mind is apt to form, there is nothing more difficult than to select those which are most proper for the conduct of life. So that I cannot imagine what is meant by the mighty zeal in some people for asserting the freedom of thinking; because, if such thinkers keep their thoughts within their own breasts, they can be of no consequence, farther than to themselves. If they publish them to the world, they ought to be answerable for the effects their thoughts produce upon others. There are thousands in this kingdom, who, in their

thoughts, prefer a republic, or absolute power of a prince, before a limited monarchy; yet, if any of these should publish their opinions, and go about, by writing or discourse, to persuade the people to innovations in government, they would be liable to the severest punishments the law can inflict; and therefore they are usually so wise as to keep their sentiments to themselves. But, with respect to religion, the matter is quite otherwise: and the public, at least here in England, seems to be of opinion with *Tiberius*, that *Deorum injuriæ diis curæ*. They leave it to God Almighty to vindicate the injuries done to himself, who is no doubt sufficiently able, by perpetual miracles, to revenge the affronts of impious men. And, it should seem, that is what princes expect from him, though I cannot readily conceive the grounds they go upon; nor why, since they are God's vicegerents, they do not think themselves at least equally obliged to preserve their master's honour as their own; since this is what they expect from those they depute, and since they never fail to represent the disobedience of their subjects, as offences against God. It is true, the visible reason of this neglect is obvious enough: The consequences of atheistical opinions, published to the world, are not so immediate, or so sensible, as doctrines of rebellion and sedition, spread in a proper season. However, I cannot but think the same consequences are as natural and probable from the former, though more remote: And whether these have not been in view among our great planters of infidelity in England, I shall hereafter examine.